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(29.03.04)**

Business-boosting service taps into local strengths

The east London borough of Hackney can stake two claims to fame: it is one of the most multicultural places on the planet and it also has one of the largest and most diverse range of businesses in the UK. At the recent launch of an innovative dedicated business phone line and website both those factors could be seen at work.

At 'Hackney Central' – a trendy bar in London's increasingly fashionable east end – the launch of an initiative aimed at providing some of Hackney's 10,000 businesses with a valuable commercial boost through the provision of a dedicated online and phone-based information service saw Hackney's multicultural business community out in force.

"I've been driven mad trying to track down the right service" explained Talvin Singh who runs a motor service facility in the Homerton area. "I've just checked out the website and it works ... It's got all the right stuff and it's clear to use, which is an improvement". Nearby a Somalian businessman and his Bangladeshi colleague ate sandwiches while comparing notes on the website taking turns to phone and test the operator on their fact-finding skills.

The service, which is aimed at providing Hackney's first no-nonsense centralised one-stop business telephone line and website 'search engine', went live in early March with a borough-wide advertisement and marketing campaign featuring the slogan "Profit From Our Advice". Designed to assist local businesses with any enterprise-building issues they may have it links callers to a wide range of local and national information and back-up agencies including: Hackney Business Venture, Hoxton Bibliotech and Business Link. Users wanting advice and training on business and financial planning, marketing, fund-raising and cash flow can now locate it all through one service.

The innovative facility – spearheaded by the respected regeneration agency Hackney Strategic Partnership (HSP) – was developed, in part, as a response to the fact that local authority commercial support services were varied and local companies had often complained that finding specific information was a complicated process. "This initiative is really from the bottom up" explains HSP head Paul Smith. "We have known from business feedback that a centralised service dedicated to matching client needs to relevant information was critical. This service highlights the myriad agencies that are available to give business assistance and cuts out all the running around that used to go on. We hope that this service will help stimulate local businesses and in time job creation – that in turn equates to real regeneration in action".

Wise Owls – the company contracted by Hackney Strategic Partnership to provide the Hackney Business Support Hotline and its sister website and search engine – are confident that the free service will prove to be popular. Chris Walsh, Wise Owls Director explained: “At long last there will be one point of reference for businesses to go to where they will be able to find out exactly who can provide them with the support they need and how to get hold of the right support provider. There has been a lot of confusion in the past amongst local businesses and enterprises about where to go for the support they need to grow.”

The range of accents, faces and business interests represented at the phone line and website launch ensured that Hackney’s vibrant personality shone through. The hope is that both Hackney’s unique blend coupled with new ideas for business development will provide the stimulus needed to facilitate profound economic regeneration.

- The website is located at: www.hackneybusiness.com
- The dedicated business-orientated hotline is available on: 0800 180 4240

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- For further details please phone us on 020 7923 9230, e-mail marketing@wiseowls.co.uk or write to us at Wise Owls, 18 Ashwin street, London E8 3DL. Ask for Jo Norman or Chris Walsh.
- Wise Owls is a “not for profit” organisation specialising in providing support to the over 45s looking for work. The company has carried out various research projects into different aspects of discrimination in the workplace in London, and has also provided business support and advice to businesses on the benefits of employing a diverse workforce. As well as providing support to candidates through its website www.wiseowls.co.uk, it also provides e-learning courses and a comprehensive local learning availability search engine through www.wiseowlslearn.org
- For further information please contact: Sam Wild, Jo Norman or Chris Walsh